

By Matthew Hodgart

craps, bodice more a W than a V, her legs more an X than a Y, her eyes cut for the sweet pin, her hair parlor. On the back of the porter, mounting the stairs, the cunning glowering behind a padlock, the Tintoretto's. Then she said, "Wah!"

Molloy talks to a priest about a "grey hen, which would nest in a brood nor lay and would nest in a month and more had done nothing with her since he had come from marriage to night. Like a hoha, he said, a night haha. When a joy it is to laugh, a night haha, a time, he said. . . . God is a wise one on a series of verbal puns, and the hats Professor. Their note is the hats. The madness is derived from game has its own law, and even by the law of the game. . . .

"If someone doesn't kill it, it will die." (I quote from memory, this compulsive and desperate jolting reminds one of Kafka, but would not be so terrible in the conditions alluded to his terrible in-

Stoically through the shambles

is "Matilda's England", a novella in three parts, narrated by the daughter of a farmer. The setting is an old and predictably decaying estate in what seems to be Surrey. The big house, Challacombe Manor, has belonged for generations to the Ashburtons, the family to whom the story belongs, only old Mrs Ashburn, widow of the last scion, remains. Little Matilda comes under the old lady's formidable influence, and feels her way into the gothic to perpetuate the Ashburn ethos when Mrs Ashburn herself passes on. Matilda becomes the spirit of the place, clinging, like her aged mentor, to the Challacombe past, and, with its horses, hares, and donkey carts, rears on the lawns, in the stables. After Mrs Ash-

Burton's death, which takes place, significantly, during The War, the place is bought by the vulgar Greengaries, who have made their fortune out of the war, and the sale of munitions. Much to everyone's disapproval Maudie marries their son, Ralphie, not for love of him, but for love of Challacone. She now becomes lady of the manor, like Mrs Ashburton before her. From this eminence, she allows her daughter to be seduced by one of her parents' husband, to become apparent, and in due course Ralphie leaves, never to return. "I sit here now in [Mrs Ashburton's] drawing room", writes Matilda, "and may perhaps become as old as she was. Sometimes I walk up and down the midway. . . There are rows of coloured caravans, and motorcars and shacks. . . Nothing is like it was." Matilda's family and friends have often accused her of "cruelty"; yet where does the cruelty really lie? The cruelty, the rapacity, the greed, the "killing" during The War; and the Japs' campers are not being kind to the countryside so lovingly evoked. Artistic reticence and aesthetic idealism restrain Trevor from the elegant cadences for which his material is crying out. To maintain a formalism under such duress is little short of mastery.

The centrepiece of the collection

In its general effect the novel resembles a long preface by Bernard Shaw. It is witty, wide-ranging, often surprising, quite often wise—yet there is somehow a failure of seriousness or of coherence that makes the arguments unpersuasive. Anthony Burgess finds opportunities to comment on decolonization, the student unrest, the sexual revolution, the war, the women's liberation movement, the hippies, the New Left, the anti-hobby-horses are on parade. At one point he refers slightly to *Clockwork Orange*: "It is not, in my view, a very good novel—to be didactic, too linguistically exhibitionist." But at least in that novel the didacticism, the linguistic exhibitionism is harnessed to a fictional purpose.

More sub than culture

[illegible]

Since this America is episodic—Charlotte Border's Chicago is a crazily blown-up, dive-bar-and-city-where-streets-and-avenues-glimpse-past-their-walled-off, gimped, incongruous oddities, putters, shifts that pass in the night—it invites, and gets from Carol White, a perigrinating act of *They Do It All With Mirrors* has in fact discarded most pretensions to the sequential for, instead, jottings, shots from a fetching, chaotic, and, at times, searing series of sketches. Worried by her own approaching lucidity, her inability to join a set, pick up a through-line, Charlotte jabs at a bewilderingly smart scene as a room-mate, the friendless Trudy, with her Trans-accidental. Analysis, and her Carline broke down, and her Carline broke kindness; to mugging blocks. And there is Lane from

Akron illustrator and bad-mouthing
the plagiarist, who steals Charlotte's
lawyer-lover Ted, he, of the all-over-
the-face and the bracelet and the twenty-
five dollar haircut. And there is
Mom in shrimp-cocktail retirement
in Florida with one-legged Harry
and his "I'll give you any advice a boy
can zapppping machines."

Disposable options zip by in set
scenes. Charlotte's friends sliced
their names (Elaine; Lane; Chloe;
Trudy) and their bad-mates (one-
night stands, Lane, affirms, are
"practically the cornerstone of our
modern social structure") and the
girls' arrivals clucking men-
tions of home. Charlotte tries hard
to get well disposed towards dispos-
ability. She will take off her bra
and try easing off from respectable
Warren, and take a bad-up-of like
a bad-bitch. She'll doubtless be can-
died right through the set styles—the
smoothness of movie heroines, the
toughness of girls in feminist novels.
"As for the organic foods bit, it's a
bit appalling as Mom's taste is
languishing pyramidal, and I'm
not sure that Charlotte can't help
learning for the security she's
missed and still misses. Locked
into the urban justice, unsettled by
trendy throwawayism, her (most
tollingly touched in) dilemma is still
to have the regressive, an
unhappy girl and a robust
slowed-down personality that will
let itself be easily recycled."

Like the America it creates, this
novel is only saved from being like

ingly deplorable by nucking the deplorable interesting but the deplorable episode but the deplorable disconcerting nature of the point. Its punch-lining witlessness is brittlely feeble, but wappy verbal awareness is not only what Charol White has to go on, but what she has to go on to go on to whip one-liners like more serious talk and lengthier expositions can drop back critically. It is also what the sixties might have been, and the sixties might have been, as they say in the night, pier sub-culture—so to herself. And for all Charol White's caution about her way with words, she says this, "Charlotte. Who talks like this". Charlotte is made to wonder. "I was beginning to feel like I had come to the book club meeting to find everyone else had been to the book club through Witty Bunter's *Friends*." It remains the kind of social analysis and of the readability of a very fetching first novel.

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A great writer does not have to be a good man, but Beckett does seem to be one; a devoted son and brother, kind to all his relations, courteous in his dealings with everybody he encounters in literary and dramatic life. His first surprise was to learn how much of a good man this arch-Bohemian has been; my second surprise was to learn how comfortably off was the family he was born into. Although he certainly knew that he was being cut from destitution by small restrictions from his father, a successful quantity surveyor, and later by an inheritance. His father brought up his two sons, Christopher, teaching them to swim by the sea, and John, the cold sea. Both brothers were notable athletes, and Samuel is the only Nobel Prize winner to appear in the World War. He was awarded a Trinity College Dublin bursary for playing against Northampton), a distinction rarely achieved by cricketers. Fintor and Sheppard. Is that a trivial and useless piece of information? I don't think so. What, however its content is concerned with, the style is what these three writers have all striven to achieve. Incidentally, the *rigmarole* in *Molloy* ("the sixteen sucking stones") ("Taking the stones from the right pocket of my greatcoat, and putting it in my mouth; I replaced it in the right pocket of my greatcoat by a stone from the right pocket of my some umpteen times the size of the others: American and French readers could hardly be expected to grasp that point, nor would Beckett care whether anyone did or not."

The most foolish thing he has done is his extremely lumpy body (and this reality is trivial) as to wear, in imitation of Joyce, shoes too large for his large feet; as a result he has suffered greatly from corns and bunions, as did W. H. Auden for the same reason. There are many references to drinking in this book, but Beckett's most serious vice seems to have been heavy cigarette smoking, a form of slow suicide. He had, for example, to his younger grandchildren, "his even-recessed ears . . . [and] from a suspected lung cancer. Physically, down to the suspected lung cancer, he resembled the late Sir Francis Chichester, an exemplar of leanness and toughness: in fortitude and powers of endurance there is also a similarity, and in enjoying, or, rather, in disavowing, the enjoyment of the word, a sole voyage round the Horn of Africa by boat. Beckett proved the heroism in the French Resistance, an episode well documented here.

Almost everything in Beckett is autobiographical, but in an idiosyncratic way. It is based on his own experiences and memories, but it is not autobiography in the conventional sense of self-pity, self-justification or even self-exploration. The experiences are detached from the historical Samuel Beckett and are put in the mouths of fantastic clowns or



Part of an Indian totem pole from the north-west, reproduced in 1964 by the University of Washington

quate lavatories in the house. If that is true, and not just an addition to the extensive Beckett mythology, it reflects well on him, at a time when those to whom he is closest are composing heap and the nitrogen cycle, and when he is bound to remind one of the confinement of Malraux: "dish and pot, dish and pot, these are the dishes." This does not mean that the chief characters of *Malraux*, which Professor Bair calls the most autobiographical of his works, is Beckett, in the sense that Stephou Dodds is Joyce.

More might be true of Belacqua of that one famous tour de force *More Pricks than Kicks*, with its characters in all the stories and plays after *Murphy* are not projections of the historical Beckett, but rather of the Beckett who, at the end of the first, is the last word of the text; they must, happen, by strange coincidence, to some memories with their author, and to some words that he might have used.

Excellent. as Professor Baird
account of these coincidences is
is slightly deficient in two other
respects. The first concerns
his reading, although here she
has made a very interesting discovery of
something I ought to have passed
for myself years ago. This is
Becker's admiration of Samuel
Johnson, when he still reads regu-
larly. It is clearly the melancholy
specimen of the *Confessions of a Human
Wretch*, the brilliant and most
widespread in Russell, the department
of *Prayers and Meditations*, and
Johnson's sympathy for the poor
and sympathy to him. What I didn't
know is that he went so far as
to begin a play about it.

the Bones: Clov sings a "song for the folding and unfolding of the cloth," pulling the dust-sheets off the dining tables. I should like to know more about Beckett's reading of Kafka, whom he resembles both in visionary quality and in preference. There are only two short references to Kafka in this biography, neither telling us much. Of course, all writers read Kafka in the 1930s, and since with Beckett there must have been some relationship, in so many ways does it seem to be safe to say that the joy of reading Kafka's rather than the joy of writing Another visionary writer is Rimbaud whom he has learnt much is Rimbaud of *Les Illuminations* (I cannot remember that Vladimir and Estragon represent, among other persons, Rimbaud and Valérie as if they had wandered together for a while). There is more to be said about the whole French pre-surrealist and surrealist tradition in which Beckett is rooted.

I think that this biography is also somewhat deficient on the subject of Beckett's wit and humour, and especially his love of jokes. The numerous themes and sometimes made some treatment of them has Beckett is a connoisseur of conventional jokes, as well as of laughing under slapstick. *More Pricks than Kicks* ends with the story about the playman who gets shot in amateur theatre, and Murphy's favourite joke is also based at some length. Why did the comedian chuckle? Because the stout porter blither."

Murphy gets hysterical, "spining the scene. On one band she bar-maid, fresh from the kitchen."

the meaning of the music. He is amazed to see him treat these scores as notes as if they were the codes of sound." Studiedly, the interpreter which he did not put in the score, and concludes "it appears that an authentic performance of a Webern score is impossible without direct tradition."

So minute are the instructions that Beckett has given the players, always with perfect clarity and consideration, that it would appear that there is only one way to speak any given line in the plays, although Jack McGraw would know what that way is without having to be told. An authentic performance may be impossible without direct tradition. Whether this analogy is true or not, I hope for his own sake that Beckett has gone on from Ralph to Webern, for the latter would, I think, eventually afford a more greater consolation and relief. He would have this science in lines over and over again to these very effect: "The hermeneutic work, not to discover the twelve-note composition (which Webern did not do), but to perceive gradually the thinking of their emotional pattern, which may become as clear as moving as it becomes as clear as favourite quoted, "Death and the Maiden" (with music of All That Falls) with Webern, as with Beckett, but only a very few others of the century, the audience comes close to the mystery of artistic creation.

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The fable moves quickly and fires upon some swingeing debates. It wastes puts on a better show than Winston Smith: he is sharper, more colorful, less idealistic, at least as good as he gets in argument and can still gasp out a subconscious under torture. But so does Anthony Burgess's cacophonous seem to lack commitment or is too insensitive. In an epilogue, Burgess writes: "Take it as a warning, melodramatize certain tendencies." His narrative is essentially a conventional piece designed to explore some of separate ideas and hypotheses. The world he creates is a material reality, not a tale told. Nor is it consoling. Since the government conceals every strike demand almost indefinitely, it is scarcely credible that inflation should be so modest. It is a sandwich for 150 million, twenty-hour workers can achieve a standard of living close to that of the figure of 3,500,000 unemployed Arabs, mosques, teenage gangs mentioned but not seen. There is a state-imposed language called "Worker's English," but few of the novel's characters speak it. It is neither vision nor insight—simply a sequence of bright ideas.

In fact the fable proper covers barely half of the composition. It is supported by a folding of essays, a preface, and a book opens with summary and then an extended critique of Orwell's *Animal Farm*, which Anthony Burgess's general but repeatedly cross-referenced comments on Orwell are freely and shrewdly used to tell them, are, quite skillfully,

[illegible][illegible]

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Yearning for Jerusalem

By A. S. Byatt

AMOS OZ:

The Hill of Evil Counsel
Translated by Nicholas de Lange
210pp. Chatto and Windus, £5.50.

Amos Oz has something in common with South African writers in English such as Dan Jacobson and Nadine Gordimer, and even with Solzhenitsyn, in that he has a piece of history—local, national, political, human—which, unlike the tremblings of our own welfare state, or our decadent English nostalgia, seems to require recording because it is urgent and, because new, unrecognizable. The Israeli novelist, like the South African, can write with delicate realism about small lives, or tell fables about large issues, but his writing, even in translation, gains vitality simply from his subject matter.

The Hill of Evil Counsel contains three long tales about the last two years of the British Mandate in Palestine, the uncertain, shifting, hopeful, terror-ridden years before the war, and the declaration of the independent Jewish state. The characters of all three stories live somewhere in a decaying, dusty, makeshift Jerusalem, the city which, as the substitute for a Holy City, where they carry out an insecure compromise between squabbling and settling, is Israel to become both rubble and flowering desert, the fate of Jerusalem is even more problematic. Amos Oz shows us this only obliquely through the histories, hopes, extravagant dreams and anxieties of his families.

In each story there are anxious

older men. The vet, Dr Kipnis, who emigrated in 1932 with a dream of a cattle farm in Galilee, but has a small square garden of geraniums threatened by Arab goats and drought, and a new house on an estate. There is the poet, Mr Nohamkin, who busies himself with romantic verses and a matchstick model of the Temple of Solomon, and prophesies that "the king of Israel" will soon rise from his hiding place in the clefts of the mountains and slay the High Commissioner. There is the dying Dr Emanuel Nussbaum of the last tale, wise, unassuming, a delicate, civilized Jew regretting Vienna, called in by the Hagannah to design a cheap, expedient, and more impractical than the old, occupied with political hatred and idealism, inventing both simple Molotov cocktails and elaborate anti-gravitational rays, the super-weapon to destroy King George VI. As the country becomes, for better or worse, their country. And there are the little boys, whose fantasies are both wilder and more lyrical than the young men's: little boys who build rockets of bits of an old bicycle "but dream also of longed-for, prowling, of the invisible, fearless Jewish leader to emerge, little

boys excited and terrified by imagined violence who, if they survive its reality, will inherit the Promised Land.

Amos Oz's translator, Nicholas de Lange, works closely with him, and it is possible, even in translation, to gauge how the shifting style, the thoughts, fears, weak and powerful hopes of the isolated people in Jerusalem. The language shifts from Old Testament grandeur to Old Testament diatribe; from composed claustrophobic chatter that one gets from Jewish novels which come from Europe and America as well. Polish nostalgia, propaganda assurances, biblical cliché and individual styles are all part of the texture of the writing. Dr Kipnis records in his journal:

I have been living in Jerusalem for three years, and I continue to yearn for it as though I were still a student in Leipzig. Yesterday morning I was obliged to put down a fine healthy horse because some youngsters had blinded it in the night with a nail. Cruelty for its own sake seems to me to be something sordid and thoroughly unnecessary. The same evening in Kibbutz Kiryat Anavim, the pioneers played a Bach suite on the phonograph, which aroused in me profound feelings of pity for the pioneers, for the horse, for Bach, for myself. Tomorrow is the king's birthday, and all the workers are to receive a special bonus. There are all sorts of contradictions, and the climate is not kind either. It is a book about contradictions and an unkind climate and it is, like the society it prefigures, forlornly alive.

seemed cheerful, and handsome in his navy blazer at the tennis club. Aunt Anousia reminisces grandly about her iconoclastic days in Paris "Do you know they had a perfume then called The Decline of the West?" This last example rather gives the game away. Of course the details aren't irrelevant, they're busily conspiring to tell about a new era of anarchy and dissolution. The flashpoint is provided by a charismatic Turkish/Jewish revolutionary called "Vee" whose confused messianism—he sees himself as the descendant of Sabbatai Zevi, a seventeenth-century failed messiah—acts as a vortex, drawing in followers as diverse as dreaming kabbalists and Baster Meinhof terrorists, not to strike hysterical persecutions, over Europe. The weather changes. It rains frogs, and CIA and KGB men. All, somehow, as a result of the cynicism, forgetfulness, corruption and hunger to believe "we can see the characters individually suffering from."

It's at this point that the split in Miss Feinstein's attitude to her plot starts to do damage to the book. Not merely because she has to chivy her chosen people around to give them significant roles in

the international drama (which is obvious, but stylishly done) but because the pressure towards disaster outgrows and outweighs the scepticism and self-analysis about the superstition. Everyone starts speaking in a metaphysical language, thick with menace and foreboding (and the grinding of gears as the novel switches from social and psychological assumptions to switch from responsibility to mysticism and portentousness, naturally, given God's well-known preference for nonsense. Miss Feinstein tries to invert against this, and put him in his place about halfway through, by sending Paul and Taty on a visit to a puppet show (hence the novel's title) but it's a Muriel Sparkish gesture she doesn't sustain. As a result, instead of "Vee" being the focus of others' paranoia and insecurity, he abruptly acquires a doubtful spiritual dignity of his own. Though his messianic quest falls horribly, he's given the last word, as if what the book was really about was the ancient Job-like confrontation with his skull. This reverential ending comes about, I think, because Miss Feinstein has after all given her projected future the inevitability of the past, and so sacrificed wit to wisdom.

which is interrupted by the... The narrative is developed... Blackouts, commercial, social, matrimonial.

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One of the attractive and... ing aspects of Mr Farrell's... his gift for comedy, and there... splendid farcical passages... particular one when Joan sets... make love to Matthew, her... natural reluctance is enhanc... the onset of fever. When she... him since before he was m... to her he must jump fully cl... into the swimming pool (a se... applies to all would-be lovers)... says that he would not think of... a thing, and heads for home. ... this well-told incident, like... others, is damaged by the fact... we never fully believe in the... Monty may be crude, boorish... stupid, but would he really... staged a display by a yogi at a... which was certain to shock not... rify his father's guest? And... ter Blackett becomes obse... by the jubilee in a way that... cannot finally be called convinc... The seriousness of Mr Farrell's... can see that the fall of Singa... must have seemed a most promi... setting but in this book he... too near to forgetting that reality... is the novelist's material, not... subject.

The Singapore Grip is an attempt to repeat, and indeed enlarge, this experiment in relation to the fall of Singapore in 1942. This time there is not just an explanatory half-page at the end, but a full-scale bibliography of sources. Figures like Generals Percival and Brooke-Popham known to, although mercifully forgotten by, history play their parts in the narrative. The principal parts in the fall of the city, which is seen chiefly through the activities of the merchant house of Blackett and Webb, who plan a jubilee celebration

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The last real autocrat

By Kyril FitzLyon

W. BRUCE LINCOLN:
Nicholas I
Emperor and Autocrat of All the
Russias
424pp. Allen Lane. £10.

"The main shortcoming of the reign of Nikolai Pavlovich consisted in the fact that it was all a mistake." "Nikolai Pavlovich" is the Russian way of referring to Tsar Nicholas I, and this comment on his reign by an unsympathetic Russian contemporary is characteristic of the difference between the Soviet Russian and the Western attitude to it. For in Soviet and Western eyes, far from being exceptional ("a mistake"), Nicholas I's reign typifies "Tsarist Russia"—an expression which has become a concept more than a reality—with all the faults associated with it: inefficiency, intolerance, obscurantism, reaction, social injustice, oppression, lack of freedom and persecution of dissident opinion.

The reign lasted for thirty years and came to an end in 1855, yet it is not uncommon for Western scholars even now, when comparing the Soviet Union to the regime it displaced and tracing lines of continuity from one to the other, to seek examples from the reign of Nicholas I (particularly the last seven years of it, the harsh and most repellent) and largely ignore the six decades of development after it. The impression thereby created of an unbroken succession from "Tsarism" to the above sense to Soviet communism may be bad history, but it does help to draw attention to the similarities if not between Nicholas I's reign and Stalin's, then between Nicholas I's and Brezhnev's.

However, all such comparisons are invalidated by the simple fact of scale. In contrast to present conditions, the "Tsarist system of Nicholas's day, in so far as it impinged on the life of ordinary people, affected only a numerically insignificant minority. It could hardly be otherwise, since the ratio of population in 1855 was merely 1.3 per thousand (as compared, says W. Bruce Lincoln in Nicholas I, "to 4.1 per 1,000 in England and 4.8 per 1,000 in France" at the time). The territorial expanse of the Empire being what it was, the number of officials available to supervise it would have been ridiculously inadequate in any case. In the absence of communications (no railways, the few roads impassable in spring and autumn), effective supervision was simply ruled out. Most Russians, therefore, peasants, almost all of them—hardly ever came in contact with civil authorities throughout their lives. This charge frequently levelled at Nicholas's regime of having created a police state sounds even less convincing when it is realized that the total number

of individuals kept under police surveillance in Russia (in 1836) was 1,631—1,090 for political reasons. Even censorship, introduced as a safeguard against subversive or revolutionary ideas, and in theory one of the strictest and most unimpeachable in Europe (at least during the last seven years of the reign), was in practice so inefficiently and, on occasion, leniently applied that it failed to prevent radical writers from publishing almost anything they wanted.

Dr Lincoln keeps these facts and figures well in mind and is thus able to present a more balanced picture of Nicholas's reign than is usually the case. His book is, therefore, an important and scholarly (as well as readable) contribution to Russian history. He makes the point that both Soviet and Western scholars devote so much time to the study of highly articulate Russian dissident intellectuals (Herzen, Bolinski, etc.) that they tend to over-emphasize the general hostility in Russia to Nicholas and his regime and to forget that there was "another side to it. This other side comprised an era of stability and peace at home and abroad... of economic progress and domestic tranquillity" which lasted throughout the 1830s and more, "the Nicholas system witnessed the greatest age of Russian literature; it saw the beginning of modern Russian music and the Russian classical ballet; and it produced the monumental architecture of the St Petersburg palaces, the unique character of the Russian intellectual life still bears the stamp of Nicholas's reign." And if to most Russian radical intellectuals Nicholas's regime was, in Herzen's words, "oppressive and vile" and the Emperor himself "beneath contempt," the St Petersburg University student quoted by Dr Lincoln probably spoke for most educated Russians of the time in saying that "Tsar Nikolai Pavlovich, magnanimous, severe and upright beyond reproach, was in our eyes a Russian folk hero."

Certainly this attitude was shared by an important section of the Russian Jewish community, though Dr Lincoln does not mention it. The Haskalah (Enlightenment) Jews, impressed by the example of Jewish government schools with Nicholas's encouragement and approval, sang the virtues of the Russian Emperor "whose name wrote one of them, 'is founded on justice and righteousness'. Foreign Jews, too, composed poems of praise in which Nicholas was said to be 'like dew unto Israel' and 'a source of living waters unto it'. Indeed, had Dr Lincoln dealt in greater detail than he has done with foreign views on Nicholas, he would no doubt have brought out the strange fact that so much radical Western European opinion was most enthusiastic about this rigid ultra-conservative, disciplinarian, to Helme he was "the standard-bearer of freedom," the paladin of Europe." Comte, the founder of

Positivist philosophy, considered him to be "the only real statesman of the nineteenth century" anywhere in the world, and Ludwig Börne spoke approvingly of his regime as "one of the manifestations of democracy"—not, incidentally, the kind of praise Nicholas himself would have relished had he known it.

His reign started inauspiciously with the Decembrist Mutiny, led by Guards officers united only in their dislike of the Tsarist system and their awareness of its many defects, of which serfdom was the most glaring—indeed, only a very few degrees better than the system of slavery practised at the time in the United States and in the colonies of European countries such as Great Britain and France. Dr Lincoln's description of the mutiny and the clash of the insurgent regiments with the troops loyal to the government in one of the most accurate in detail he reads, with squares excelling in accuracy in its details. In after-years the punishment meted out to the rebels—five hanged, thirty-one sentenced to hard labour, and some 250 to lesser punishments—came to be regarded as barbarous as the Decembrists themselves as martyrs. But at the time, as Dr Lincoln could have pointed out (but hasn't), the attitude was different and the foreign press, especially in England, praised the Emperor and his government for their "calmness and moderation," and regarded the trial and outcome as "merciful," "humane" and "wise", etc.

The Decembrist insurrection on the very first day of his reign left an indelible mark on Nicholas. But it was the wrong kind of mark. It made him suspect plots and cabals where none existed and exaggerate the importance of those that did.

The first great Westernizer

By E. H. Carr

M. S. ANDERSON:
Peter the Great
207pp. Thames and Hudson. £6.50.

The current popularity of historical biography gives encouragement to the familiar adage that "history is the biography of great men". Those grand historical figures whose names seem inconceivable without the suffix "the Great" add substance to the claim. Among these Peter the Great stands out in virtue both of the magnitude of his achievements and of the exotic background out of which he so unexpectedly emerged. The portrait of "Men in Office" in which this new biography of Peter appears prudently confines itself to the period of European history between 1500 and 1800, and the age which saw the birth and the flowering of what later historians have put together happily called "enlightened despotism".

The biographical approach to history has its pitfalls. It is too tempting to depict the chosen hero as nowhere out of nowhere and going nowhere, a blaze of light against a curtain of darkness before and after. M. S. Anderson's biography of Peter avoids at least one of these dangers. He briskly dismisses "the view of Peter's reign as marking a very sharp transition from darkness to light, from barbarism to civilization," and he spends a good many pages explaining how the way had been prepared for Peter in the half-century before he came to power. The instability and humiliation of the Time of Troubles at the beginning of the seventeenth century had been the work of a predecessor, though dwarfed by his son, was far from negligible ruler. Russian menaces which had overhung Moscow for so long were finally removed. Kiev was subordinated to a unit which could be called no longer Muscovy, but Russia. Finally, it was Alexis who defeated the Tartar, who claimed to exercise equal sovereignty with the Tsar. Russia henceforth was to be ruled by a civil, not by an ecclesiastical, autocracy.

Nevertheless, while placing Peter in his historical context, it would be absurd to minimize the extraordinary break-through which he made, and the cardinal place which he earned for himself in Russian history. His military victories, which occupy a large space in the biography, of which gave Russia the status of a European power. The turning-point was the journey to western Europe of eighteen months' duration which he undertook in 1697-8. For the prolonged absence from the seat of authority is hardly surprising, nearly paid for it with his throne, and the brutal ferocity with which he suppressed and avenged the revolt of the Streltsy after his return shocked his contemporaries as it has shocked posterity.

But he had found his inspiration in the West; and from now on his ambition was to re-create Russian society and the Russian economy on the model of up-to-date Western efficiency. It was not that he had ceased to be Russian; rather the West above his own country. But, being Russian, he was passionately determined to make Russia a match for the West—in more recent terminology, to "catch up with" the West. In this sense, he was the first great Westernizer in Russian history.

Everything in Peter's career, from the colossal erection on dreary marshland of a great new capital city, which opened a window on the West, to the trivial order to his nobles to shave their beards, seemed to conform to this one dominant pattern. The violence of the changes, and the imposedness of the hand, which he imposed, sometimes provoked resistance, which was ruthlessly and savagely crushed. As Lenin once wrote of him, he used barbarous methods to eradicate barbarism—a two-edged process. But the prevailing mood in his lifetime and for many years afterwards, both at home and abroad, was one of amazed admiration for the extraordinary transformation he had effected. Peter had not merely imitated, but surpassed the cruelties and the crudities of the age into which he had been born. But these were forgotten or condoned in the light of what he had done.

It was not till the mid-nineteenth century that the Slavophile school of Russian historians began to assail Peter's record on different grounds. Locked in controversy with the contemporary "Westerners", they saw

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GERMAN HISTORY
GORDON A. CRAIG:
Germany 1866-1945
Bpp. Clarendon Press: Oxford
University Press. £10.

Gordon A. Craig's long-expected volume on Germany in the Oxford History of Modern Europe has been worth waiting for. It is the result of many years spent in reading and writing and teaching about Germany and it contains a clear chronological political narrative with many original insights into the nature of German society and German culture. There have been several useful books on modern German history published in the last twenty years, and we shall continue to use Agatha Ramm's Germany 1789-1919, especially for its account of Germany's society and culture and its discussion of German political thought, but it is more than ten years since it was published and much new work has recently been done in Germany on the Bismarckian and Wilhelmine periods. Professor Craig's book provides the best account so far available of Germany from Bismarck to Hitler.

It will not go uncriticized, particularly by the younger German historians, and anyone who was led by Theodore Zeldin's brilliant, idiosyncratic and profound study of French society in the Oxford History of Modern Europe to expect a comparable treatment of Germany will be disappointed. Professor Craig has written a book which is probably closer to what the editors and publishers of this series had in mind: a volume, that is to say, which provides for students and the general reader a reliable, up-to-date account of the political history of united Germany from its creation under Bismarck to its dissolution under Hitler. But it is more than this. It is written with literary distinction, and Gordon Craig is able to link his account of German political development with his deep knowledge of German literature and culture, so that the novelists and painters and musicians discussed are used to illustrate the nature of the society in which they lived instead of being, as is so often the case in general works of history, a list of names tacked on to the political narrative. Like every good historian, Gordon Craig realizes that the aim of historical writing is to enlarge our own experience of the past, and he is quite clear about the moral nature of the enterprise on which he is embarking. "The darkest pages in history are often the most instructive," he writes in his preface.

The brief history of united Germany, which lasted only seventy-five years and died in the ruins of Berlin in 1945, demands the attention of reflective men, not only for what it has to teach about the role of fear and cupid-ity and obsessions in human affairs, but about the seductions of power and the seductions of political irresponsibility, and about the apparently limitless inhumanity that man is capable of inflicting upon his fellows, but because it also has much to say about courage and steadfastness, about devotion to the cause of liberty, and about resistance to the evils of tyranny.

Given this general approach to history, with its emphasis on responsibility and the moral restraints on political events, it is not surprising that Professor Craig builds his structure around individual German leaders and their personal contribution to the success or failure of German society. "Is it a mistake to begin with Bismarck?" he asks in the first sentence of his book; and he answers to much in written these days, and so insistently about the primary importance of economic and social forces in history that one runs the risk of being considered old-fashioned if one gives too much prominence to personality.

This firm stand against the tendency of many German historians today to look for explanations in the structure of society and the forces of impersonal economic determinism is maintained consistently throughout the book. Although Craig is familiar with the work of Hans-Joachim Lauth and others of the new school of German historical writ-

ing, he firmly rejects their approach and redirects our attention to particular individuals and particular events. Where he differs most markedly from many of his colleagues in the field is in his comparative neglect of economics. He is interested in political economy in the most literal sense, and economic developments are only of interest in so far as they affect the perceptions of politicians. Thus, while he uses the work of, for example, Hans Rosenberg as the basis for an interesting discussion of the political consequences of the shift to protectionism in the 1890s and related to the almost important work on labour relations in the Third Reich to illustrate Hitler's policies, he does not attempt an analysis of the peculiar nature of German capitalism and of its differences from capitalism in other countries, so that he bypasses the current debate about the nature of modernization in Germany.

Part of Gordon Craig's answer to criticism of this kind might be to point out that he rejects another of the assumptions of much contemporary German historical writing, namely that there was a necessary continuity between the Bismarck era and the Third Reich. Even if some of the social and economic structures remained unchanged, the generation of individual statesmen and men of letters who were always with them would always have been different had different personalities been in power.

Those German historians of the modern school who argue that Hitler was the product of a continuum that includes Bismarck, William II and Stresemann are wrong. The similarities of thought and action that have been adduced to prove Hitler's kinship with other German statesmen or to demonstrate the native roots of his political behaviour are too trivial to be persuasive. Adolf Hitler was *sui generis*, a force without a real historical past.

Perhaps this insistence on the uniqueness of Hitler's personality and his lack of historical roots is not wholly borne out by Professor Craig's own account, which shows vividly how Hitler's understanding of some of the historic weaknesses of German society allowed him to appeal so effectively to the fears and hopes of millions of Germans. Hitler's ability to exploit the defects of the political system of the Weimar Republic, the discontents of the middle classes, the injustices of the German economic system, all testify to his awareness of the historical forces which had produced them; and his sense of a mission, however perverted, was rooted in his own conception of his historical role in the development of the German nation. Moreover, Professor Craig's account of the way in which responsible intellectuals and writers—Gerhart Hauptmann, Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger, Gottfried Benn—came, even if briefly, to accept National Socialism, shows clearly that to them at least Hitler seemed to embody certain specifically German traditions and to reflect some of their own inherited beliefs. Nevertheless, Craig is right in his central contention that without the demonic personality of Hitler German development in the twentieth century would have been very different. The strength of the conservatives, the power of big business, the influence of the military, the lack of a democratic tradition, might all have been combined in the 1930s to produce a new political regime, but it is unlikely that it would have been either as effective or as evil as Hitler's Reich.

Gordon Craig ends his book with the collapse in 1945, and he makes the point that Hitler's revolution of destruction had been so complete that the German people had no option than to start again from the beginning. "Because his work of demolition had been so complete, the German people would be left with the German people would be repaired or rebuilt upon." This is true of course of 1945 when Germany was not only materially reduced to ruins but also seemed to be cut off completely from its own history. But it is important to point out that the young revolutionaries in Germany in the 1960s suffered from their lack of knowledge of the recent past, and

suggests that an acquaintance with the radical ideas and movements of the 1920s might have given more sensible direction to their own foolishness." Yet even in 1945 the historic sense had not wholly gone both among conservatives and among those who in that desperate time were searching for an alternative German historical tradition. I remember vividly some episodes in Berlin in June 1945; on the one hand an ex-officer of the Kaiser's army (pointing to the Russian sentries from Soviet Asia to mount guard) and saying "Our Emperor was right when he warned us against the Yellow Peril", and, more seriously, and on the other side, the extraordinary mood in which a hungry and exhausted audience greeted performances of Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* and the almost intolerable tension in the theatre during a performance of *Fidelio* at the moment when the prisoners were allowed out into the sunlight. And if some at least of Germany's historical traditions survive, in 1945, it is an interesting question to assess how many of them are still alive in both the Federal and the Democratic Republics.

The Clarendon Press is to be congratulated on offering good value for money, though £10 for the book is still too expensive for students. The publishers also continue their admirable practice, abandoned by most other firms, of putting the footnotes at the bottom of the pages. It is also an excellent idea to leave the many quotations from German poets and popular songs in the original German, with a translation in an appendix, because this brings out the flavour of German life in a way that an English translation cannot. It reinforces the sense of what it was like to be a German which is one of the greatest strengths of this book. Inevitably in a work of this length and scope there are small mistakes: the misquoting of places in the "September Programme" of German war aims in 1915 rather than in 1914 makes nonsense of the already not very convincing criticism of Fritz Fischer's work by Arthur Balfour was not a Lord in 1898; Lord Allen of Hurtwood—once chairman of the No Conscription Fellowship and a former treasurer and chairman of the ILL, even if by the 1930s his support of pacifism would have been surprising to see himself described as "an important figure in the Conservative Party". But of course slips of this kind—do not detract from a work which shows scholarship, humanity, a balanced judgment and a clear personal viewpoint.

The author of any general history must omit much that another writer would put in. Professor Craig has so many interesting references to German writers and books that it is surprising how little he says about Richard Wagner, whose work perhaps affected the outlook of educated Germans—and even half-educated ones like Hitler—more than that of any other artist. Still, most of us have had the experience of finding Wagner, with his assault on the nerves and the emotions at so many levels, more than we can bear, so it is not surprising if Gordon Craig cannot quite face the phenomenon. The strength of the book lies in its clarity and conciseness and in its many omissions a discussion of many broad structural problems in the society and economics of Germany or of the complex relationship between Prussia and a united Germany (and surely the abolition of Prussia was one of the most significant historical consequences of 1945), the author has so much to say about foreign policy and the role of the army as about domestic politics and the character of German political leaders that we are much in his debt. Professor Craig quotes a remark of Blaise Pascal, the first of whom make the water of the past clear so that you can see right to the bottom, while the second make this water muddy." He himself is undoubtedly the very clarity of his account perhaps leaves something for those of us who reach German history to do in muddying the waters, stirring up controversy or probing the murky depths which still underlie the clear water of the past.

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